

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

SPECIALTY BAR ASSOCIATIONS

Kathryn Starnella, Colorado Hispanic Bar Association

Patching the pipeline through mentoring

BY TONY FLESOR
LAW WEEK COLORADO

LAW WEEK: This is now the end of your year as president. Is there anything within that time that you saw has changed? It seems to me like people are just getting more and more tuned into diversity issues, but I'm also curious if there are actual changes that are being made going with that.

KATHRYN STARNELLA: There are things that we are starting to implement. I just looked at [the Center for Legal Inclusiveness'] website last night, and it lists my alma mater's statistics. Entering first-year classes in law school are around 30 percent diverse — a little bit less than that — but then the numbers really drop off once you get into practice, and so CLI is starting to take the effort not to ignore the needs that still ex-

ist in ensuring that the pipeline to law school is diverse but also how to increase retention. What's going on with minority attorneys once they reach their mid-level associate level, and why aren't they making it to the senior ranks in law firms and corporations, and why are they leaving the legal profession?

So in terms of how the CHBA is trying to address that, our immediate past president Ruth Mackie and our education committee chair Jonathan Booker, are working with [Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program] and Ryann Peyton to tailor the CAMP model for the CHBA so that we could ideally pair up more senior Hispanic attorneys with more junior Hispanic attorneys.

I think when people get involved with the CHBA, they realize that there's informal mentoring going on. But when you are considering the benefits of joining the CHBA, and you're viewing the organization

from the outside, you don't really see the mentorship opportunities that are available. And it has been the lament of our junior attorneys that, you know, we've got so many accomplished Hispanic senior attorneys — they've become judges, they've risen up in their law firms or in-house and things like that. And the young attorneys feel like they're not getting the benefits of mentorship.

We're hoping, and my goal during my presidency, was to get the CAMP-CHBA mentorship program off the ground. Things always take longer than you have hope, so I think, hopefully, by the end of my presidency we will have the foundation in place.

Another thing we're doing to ensure that the law school pipeline remains diverse is we started a scholarship fundraising program called the Circle of Giving. And that is specifically through the CHBA as opposed to the CHBA Foundation.

Minority students are really far

less likely than white students to take on educational debt. And so already that diminishes the likelihood that they're going to apply to law school, and even just to getting through college is the challenge. And so the pool of Hispanic students making it through the pipeline, graduating from college in four or five years and getting into law school, that's dwindled. And then by the time you're looking at completion of your first year of law school, there's another big drop off.

So we've used that as really the inspiration and motivation for getting the Circle of Giving off the ground.

For our first target group, we approached several Hispanic state and federal judges, we've received commitments from I think about 20 of them. And so to join the Circle of Giving, it's a five-year commitment to pay to contribute \$200 a year. We're looking at awarding our first scholarships at our banquet in January.



While Kathryn Starnella was president of the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association, the organization worked to address the pipeline of Hispanic students into the legal profession by starting a new mentoring program. / COURTESY PHOTO

LAW WEEK: Last year, the specialty bar associations finished a video that focused on diverse judges. Is that still a focus for the CHBA?

STARNELLA: I don't know how widely that has been viewed by the various nominating commissions, but increasing the diversity of the bench remains a key issue for the CHBA. I think it's more of an informal basis where you see members who either have expressed an interest in ultimately pursuing judgeships or have more immediate interest in pursuing judgeships.

We have a committee that is working with the people who have self-identified or people that have been identified by others in helping them get their applications together, helping them with mock interviews. And in the past, we either have, or we've talked about doing something similar for law school students so that they can start to think about, O.K., while this is several years down the road, what experiences do you need to be getting in law school to make this more of a reality?

LAW WEEK: What else has been going on as far as efforts to change how the profession looks?

STARNELLA: We've also been developing partnerships with orga-

nizations that have expressed an interest in stepping up their diversity and inclusion. One big partner for us this year has been Husch Blackwell. They have been one of our premier sponsors this year, and it all started last year at our banquet.

They used that opportunity to be a sponsor of our banquet for the purpose of identifying future Hispanic attorneys that they want to hire. And so at their table, I think they hand-picked law students or students in the Law School, Yes We Can program who they want to establish connections with and maintain a dialogue with, and I know for a fact their collaboration has been successful. I do hold up our relationship with Husch Blackwell as the model of how a strategic collaboration can help both sides.

I think as more people learn about this collaboration, hopefully, we'll be able to establish other collaborations with other firms and also help in essence, then to enhance the diversity of their offices.

LAW WEEK: In the past year, immigration has been a huge policy issue and has had a big response from attorneys. Are there any issues like that that you've been dealing with that is reflective of concerns of your members?

STARNELLA: In the spring, we

took on the State Court Administrator's Office's guidance memo on probation policies.

Our issue was the guidance memo that office had issued — it's a guidance memo, the judicial districts have free rein to implement whatever policy they want — but a number of judicial districts determined this is the policy.

And it has contributed to oversharing of information by probation officers to [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], and it was more than the law required.

We approached the metro area judicial districts about changing that policy.

First of all, we approached the State Court Administrator's Office, and they were open to our proposed revisions, and they adopted some of them. We said, O.K. as a compromise, we're fine with that. But we decided that we would reach out to the various judicial districts to determine what their policies are for the local level. The 18th Judicial District, for example, completely revised its policy based on our concerns. So you're right, that's been a big issue for us.

Then with the census coming up, we are getting organized. Our public policy chair is figuring out who the stakeholders are in Colorado regarding redistricting. And so there are a couple of ways that the CHBA plans to get involved as well. We wrote a

letter to the Department of Commerce to oppose that citizenship question [on the 2020 census] to express concerns as to why it's a problem. And then another big area for us this year is mental health. Mental health issues are obviously an issue throughout Colorado, but I think it does disproportionately affect minority communities, especially with the stigma with mental health issues, and then the lack of resources and being able to pay for it.

LAW WEEK: Is there anything that you see as something that should be like a next step or something else that you think the community needs to address?

STARNELLA: It's problems that continue to exist. The cost of legal education, policy issues — there are policy issues that bring the diversity bar associations together. As an example, the Women's Bar Association has been leading the fight on the Equal Pay Act, they wrote the proposed legislation on the issue, and they reached out to the fellow bar associations, and there's clear data that shows how minority females are even more disproportionately impacted by disparities and pay, so I really think that the various diversity bars came together in that effort and still there's more to do. •

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